Georgina Volkerts Evans

I. Comments on "The Depression", in a program presented at the Petaluma Museum on July 16, 1989. Sherman Boivin and George Hobbie, also on the program, presented reminiscences of the Great Depression as well.

Since I was a teenager for most of the years between 1930 and 1940, I would like to tell you the things that are important to me and how it was to live on a small ranch, what we did to make money and what we did for entertainment and fun.

I guess our main income came from the approximately 20 cows that my father milked by hand, sometimes with the help of a hired man, sometimes not, and later on with the help of my brothers when they were older. The milk was separated by a DeLaval separator and the cream was sold to the Petaluma Cooperative Creamery. The skim milk we sold to chicken ranchers. We had twelve brood sows and when the little pigs were weaned, they were sold for $6.00 apiece. We also had a bull for bull service and this sometimes became a source of embarrassment for some of the people would telephone when one of us children would answer the phone. If the person hesitated because they did not want to tell the reason that they had called, we children had our instructions and we would ask -- "Do you want the bull brought out?" and they would say "Oh, ah, well, yes". We knew that each trip meant $3.00 and every dollar counted. Across the creek we had several acres planted in alfalfa and a good part of it was made into hay for our own use, but during the depression, lots of people raised rabbits for food for themselves and also to be able to sell the surplus. So, we had a ready market for green alfalfa. The alfalfa was cut fresh every morning and weighed out on a scale in the barn and our customers would tell us how much they wanted at a time to feed their rabbits and how many times a week they required alfalfa and we had hand made signs with their name printed on cardboard and so we would stick their sign into the pile of alfalfa and they could come anytime it was convenient for them with their pickups or their model T's or whatever and take the pile of alfalfa that had their name on it and leave their money in a box.

When the creek ran dry in the summer time, my father would scrape sand out of the creek bed with a Fresno scraper and a team of horses. We sold the sand to chicken ranchers who used it for litter in their chicken houses so this was another source of income. In back of the house we had an orchard that had every kind of fruit that you could imagine and several kinds of apples that you don't even hear about anymore. Astrakhans and Hoovers, and Bellflowers. Lots of the fruit we canned for ourselves, but the apples were graded and the best ones with no worm holes, no San Jose scale, were sold either in front of our house along the highway or in grocery stores in Petaluma and Santa Rosa. My father rented fields, I remember one on a side hill on Paula Lane where he planted potatoes and we children did not have to dig potatoes, but we did have to pick them up and put them in sacks and when they were brought home they had to be sorted. The number ones and number twos went by the truckload to grocery stores in Petaluma and Santa Rosa, I guess we ate some of the number threes, some were kept for seed and the little ones went to the pigs. To feed the pigs, as well as the rest of our livestock, sometimes was a difficult task. We had a big cooker outside the building where the pigs were housed, and we brought barley mash from Grace Brothers Brewery in Santa Rosa for the pigs, we brought whey from Western Refrigerating Company in East Petaluma, dead chickens went in, small potatoes went in, and they also got the left over apples from our apple crop.

Another thing we grew were kale plants. We planted the seed and when the plants were about eight to ten inches tall, we sold the kale plants in bundles of 100 for fifteen cents a bundle to the chicken ranchers who planted them out in their fields and then picked the leaves fresh everyday for their chickens. We grew field pumpkins which were large, some went to the pigs and some were chopped up for the cows, but the seeds were washed on wire screens and dried and sold to other ranchers for seed for their fields.

Somewhere along the way my mother acquired an incubator which held 100 eggs and the eggs had to be turned every day. We converted a wood shed into a brooder house and it had a coke stove in the center for heat for the baby chicks. The first few batches of pullets and broilers were profitable, but after a while they began to contract chicken diseases like coccidiosis and

everything else they could manage to think of and so it was not long before the chicken business was abandoned.

My father had been a rural mail carrier and whenever there was an emergency at the post office, either someone was sick or I don't know if they took vacations in those days, but periodically he would be called in to take one of the rural routes. He knew all the rural routes so he could take any one of them and be a substitute. My mother went back to the silk mill to work, where she had worked before she was married, now known as Sunset Line and Twine. There were times when we children were home alone and there was hardly a day that went by during the Depression that we did not have an itinerant man with a bundle on his back knock on the back door and ask for food. Some of them would ask for some work to do for a meal and others were not capable of working. If they asked for work and it was near mealtime, we would send them over to the wood pile to cut some wood while we fixed the meal. We always had a table and a chair on the back porch, they were kept there for this purpose. If it was between mealtimes, and there wasn't anything readily available for us children to fix, we were told to make a couple of fried egg sandwiches, any kid could make a fried egg sandwich and put some dried coffee grounds in a paper bag and put in some fruit or vegetables, whatever was available, because we knew that the jungle was just down below the trestle near our property and whatever food the man would receive from us or anybody else he would take down there and share with others. We were told not to turn anyone away without food.

In the entertainment department, there were two things that were important to me at the time and they were swimming and dancing. We were lucky enough to have a good swimming hole in our creek on our property and I can remember when as many as twenty kids would come out from town to swim. There were other swimming holes in the creek, but ours must have been profitable for Tom Karas (Tom's Ice Cream), because he would drive out as far as our swimming hole with his ice cream truck and when he rang the bell we could for five cents buy an ice cream cone to go with your free day of swimming. We also enjoyed, as a family, going to Mirabel Park to swim and to Monte Rio. We would go on Sundays after church and have time to swim and still get home to do the chores, because you always had to

get home in time to feed the chickens, gather the eggs, feed the pigs and milk the cows. Although, we girls never did milk the cows, we could do everything else on the ranch. On summer evenings we enjoyed going over to Boyes Springs to swim, they had a large pool and a small pool of naturally hot water. Boyes Springs was a popular place in those days and my parents enjoyed swimming and dancing which is another reason why we probably did so much of both, but we enjoyed swimming and for twenty-five cents you could rent a dressing room and we would rent one dressing room for mom and the girls and one for pop and the boys.

Dancing, we danced in chicken houses, in barns, I remember a barn dance up in the Sonoma Mountains. We went to the Orange Lodge dances which were held in an upstairs hall on Main Street somewhere in the vicinity of Schluckebiers Hardware Store. We danced in the Penngrove Woman's Club to a small local orchestra and we went to Hermann Sons dinner dances, the whole family went so it could not have been very expensive. We had a delicious dinner and we would dance to live music. But our favorite place to dance and the place we kids learned to dance was a little hall hanging over the creek on D Street Extension across the road from the Union School. Everybody went. All the children went and the little ones, when they were tired, just went to sleep. This is where we learned to dance. We danced to Guido Boccaleoni's accordion, we danced to Dario Calegari's accordion and we danced to Ken Colins' accordion. Probably, on Sunday the same group of people and children would gather for a picnic either at Papermill Creek or on one of the beaches on Tomales Bay, we had our favorite spots.

Other entertainment in town, which we took part in, were the Wednesday night Bank Night and Dish Night at the California Theater. It always made me feel sad when I heard someone's dish break because there was only one person who could win the money, but everybody got a dish, that was your special prize and if you lost it that was a shame. We could usually scrape up enough money for two of us to go to Bank Night, my mother and one of us children usually went. On Friday nights we would sometimes drive and park by Walnut Park and listen to the Petaluma Municipal Band playing in the bandstand. People would blow the horns on

their cars for applause. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons at the California Theater there would be a vaudeville group called Nat Holts Comedians, my folks enjoyed vaudeville and we would try to go to some of those.

There were few long trips taken during the Depression, at least for us. I remember trips to the Sacramento State Fair, we all enjoyed that. We made one camping trip to Santa Cruz with borrowed tent. We made one automobile trip to Eureka where we stayed at auto courts and we children slept on the floor on a mattress. We made one trip to Nevada, we had relatives in Fernley and Fallon and as far as I can remember, those are the only trips that we took during the Depression.

My first job after I graduated from Petaluma High School in 1935 was housework because I was not 18 when I graduated and you could not expect to get a steady job until you were 18. So I did housework during the day and at 6:30 in the evening I would show up at the California Theater and don my usherette uniform and be an usherette for twenty five cents an hour. Housework paid $15.00 a month. I did not work every night at the Theater because Doc Naify had several nieces and nephews who needed jobs too. So if I got a check for $5.00 a week, that was a good week. My future husband Lew Evans was accepted into the Mare Island apprentice program and this was considered a good thing because it was the equivalent of a four year college education. When I was eighteen I started to work at the telephone office and this was a steady job. If you had a steady job in those days it was a good thing and it did not matter whether you liked your work or not, if it was a steady job you stayed with it. It just happened that I enjoyed being a telephone operator, but that would not have made any difference, a steady job was something to hang onto. Lew started his work as an apprentice ship fitter, his starting wage was $13.49 a week. By the time we were married in 1940 he had received a raise and was making $18.49 a week and I was making $22.00 a week at the telephone office and so there was a standing joke in our family through the years, that he had married me for my money. We had another break, besides these fantastic wages we started out with, we rented our first apartment from a relative and instead of paying the going rate of $25.00 a month rent, we only had to pay $20.00.

The Depression years, I think, were harder for our parents than they were for us, because all of our friends were in the same situation. Although I talked to a school friend recently about our discussion here today and she said "I don't see how you can even talk about the Depression, we lost our ranch, my whole world came tumbling down, we did not know where we were going to go, we did not know what we were going to do. Because the feed company had taken our ranch." Well, we fared better than that, although there was a mortgage on our ranch which was not paid off until 1945 and it was difficult during the Depression years to even make the interest payments on the mortgage. My father had loans from the bank to buy more cattle and I remember him managing to get 30 day extensions on his loans so that we did not lose our ranch. I am sure that it was due to our "diversified" farming and my parents' ingenuity that got us through, but growing up during the Depression years gave us a different set of values and when we see the craving for material things today, we can't help but remember what we got along without, how we managed and the enjoyment we shared as a family along the way.

II. These later comments by Georgina about the program and her memories are taken from a tape prepared for her family.

Well, my speech was well received, it got a lot of applause.

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Sherman Boivin talked first about politics, the NRA, the WPA, PWA and the CCC and all the other organizations that were started by Roosevelt during the Depression to lift us out of the doldrums.

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One of the things I did not talk about in my talk at the Museum was our experience with the NRA (National Recovery Act). We knew that these men were coming to the ranch. I heard my folks talk about it and all I knew at the time was that it had something to do with cutting down production and raising prices. For some reason, known only to them I guess, the men came to our ranch and they killed a percentage of our little pigs, the exact numbers I don't know, because I remember Mom herding all us kids over to

the other side of the house to play for a little while and we could hear the little pigs screaming and whatever ones were killed were buried right on our place, on the vegetable garden side of the house which I thought was adding insult to injury. After the men were gone, my Father came in and put his head down in his arms and that was the only time I've ever seen him cry.

Some of the other things that I mentioned that I forgot to put in this tape were that I cut alfalfa for a few times with the mowing machine with a team of horses in the morning before I went to school. I was still going to Cinnabar then so I must have been in the sixth grade, but when I was late for school a few times, my Mother put a stop to that; it must have been between hired men. Also the alfalfa that we sold, sold for twenty five cents a pile and up. In the part where I talked about Lew going to Mare Island I also added "earned while you learned" which was an attractive position to get.

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George Hobbie was the other speaker, he followed me. He talked about what it was like to be in business during the Depression. He and his father had the Rex Hardware Store down on the corner where Camera Corner is now. He said the Depression kind of crept up on them a little at a time. At first, the ranchers would pay cash or within a short length of time for the plumbing supplies and their hardware that they bought for the ranch and then pretty soon they would come in and say I can't pay the whole bill this month, I'll make monthly payments, and that was all right. Pretty soon they could not make monthly payments, the biggest part of their income came in the Fall when they harvested their crops so could Rex Hardware carry them until the Fall and then they would pay. Well they did that too and when the Fall came the farmers could not pay their bills because they could not sell their crops and in the meantime Rex Hardware had to keep buying and maintaining its inventory and they had to borrow money from the bank to do it. So Mr. Hobbie told how he was called in by a banker to the bank by a banker whom he would not name, but I am sure it was Mr. Behrens because he was that kind of a person, and the banker told him that he had instructions to call in their loan, but he knew that they could not pay what they owed because no one was paying them. So he said that if they could pay one tenth of one percent on their loan each month and not have to borrow

anymore from the bank, then that would satisfy his superiors. So that is what they did and it took them ten years to pay off their loan.

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It was an interesting afternoon, other people had memories that they wanted to share. Noreen Campbell was there, my high school biology teacher, she is 92 years old and she was the first one to stand up and say "all of you people in this room that were my students, were the best students I ever had", and almost everybody clapped because almost everybody in the room had been her pupil at one time or another. Vivian and Royce Anderson were there, Vivian Anderson was my junior high sewing teacher. Of course, we had lots of relatives there too, but it was a fun experience, but I am glad it is over and I don't think I want to go in for public speaking.

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Two more things I will mention about the program, the person who told me that she did not know how I could even speak about the Depression was Elizabeth George Van De Mark, her father was more of a politician than a chicken rancher and they lost their ranch out on Bodega Avenue right next to where Bodega Avenue Flea Market is, the Tillmans lived on their ranch for a while. Lots of people lost their ranches to the feed companies and I remember one fatality because of this, one of our neighbors committed suicide when the feed company took his ranch and he had nothing else to do, no place else to go.

So the times were tough in Petaluma, not as far as eating because we grew our own vegetables and we always had enough food to eat and enough to share. I remember taking a car full of vegetables and fruit, all that we could get into our car with the six of us in there, to go down to Aunt Jenny and Uncle Emmett's in San Francisco because they lived in a flat and they had three teenage boys and Uncle Emmett was a salesman for wholesale bakery supplies to the bakeries and he certainly did not make much money. So the few times that we did go down there, the car would be loaded with ears of corn and string beans and squash and whatever else we could get in there, apples. The apples that we sold in front of the house, down in a little stand at the end of the lawn, we sold for fifty cents a box, a fifty pound box. The

potatoes, I don't remember the price, but everything that we sold was for very little money and some of the things that we sold went for barter, I remember selling potatoes and apples to -- it was called Skaggs in those days, later Safeway, store and instead of taking money, we would buy groceries, things that we could not raise, instead.

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The first day that I worked at the California Theater, it was a Sunday afternoon and the movie that was playing was the Dionne Quintuplets. The theater was packed, the lobby was packed and people were standing in lines down the street on the sidewalks waiting to get in and you could imagine a nervous usherette on her first day on the job trying to remember in the dark whether there were two seats together in the center or four seats together on the side half way down or whatever. It was not an easy day and it is one that I will always remember. The twenty five cents an hour that we earned for being an usherette wasn't the only thing that we derived from this job, we also had a fringe benefit, we could enjoy all the free shows that we could absorb.

One of my granddaughters had asked me to say something about dating when I was a teenager. I remember my first date, it was pretty embarrassing, I was supposed to meet a boy at the Theater. Nobody had cars in those days. Steffy asked me one day how old I was when I got my first car, well I thought about it and I never did have my own car. She said, well how did you get around, well either our parents had to take us places and pick us up, even when I was working I did not have a car. I either walked to town or if I was going to be working late at night in the telephone office, or even when I was at the Theater, somebody would have to come in to pick me up. When I learned to drive, I could drive the family car if nobody else needed it, but it had to be pretty important for me to take the car.

Getting back to the first date, I remember how nervous and scared I was and my mother drove me into the Theater and we waited, and we waited and the boy had evidently lost his nerve because he never did show up and so I went home. That was my first date. I started going out with the son of one of the families that used to come to all the dances that we went to as a family.

We went together for quite a while until he found somebody he liked better. So then when I was working at the Theater I went out with the projectionist who worked there and he was a friend of Merv and Ted Evans and after the theater at night and when the show was over, sometimes we would meet with other theater people, we would either go up to Santa Rosa and meet the projectionist from up there and his girlfriend or sometimes Don Burns who I was going with and Merv and I would go up to Rio Nido. Our dating time started late in the day because we had to work usually until 11:00 at night or so, whenever the show broke. Up at Rio Nido is where we met Harold Smith, later he and his father progressed from a bingo game to Harold's Club in Reno, one of the first gambling casinos, but at that time 1935-36 Harold Smith and his father ran a bingo game at Rio Nido. There were several concessions there and he had a big red setter dog and I remember us going and talking to him and waiting while he closed up his bingo game for the night. I enjoyed dancing at the Grove in Guerneville which was a hall in town, even though they called it the Grove, and we danced to bands that later became big name bands the ones that you hear now that are the big name bands of those days. They played one night stands in the Grove. We danced to Ted Fiorito, Pinky Tomlin, Jan Garber, and lots of others that I probably should have remembered but I don't. We weren't, at least I, wasn't that impressed by the fact that they were big name bands, I just enjoyed dancing. It was fun to go to the public dances because you danced with people whether you knew them or not. On the times that I was invited to go De Molay affairs, I did not enjoy those and I didn't enjoy high school dances. You had to dress up for these affairs and I did not like that. I was used to maybe sewing a dress on Saturday morning and afternoon and wear it to a dance Saturday night. When you went to De Molay and Rainbow dances you had to have nice dresses and I in the first place my folks could not afford them, so if I had one nice dress that was it and you could not show up at too many dances in the same dress. What I did not like about the high school dances was that your partner was given a program and he went around and got dances for you and the names of your future partners were written down on this program and to me that was an insult because I was a good dancer and I never had any trouble at the public dances getting partners and it was demeaning to me to have my partner go around to find my partners, I felt

like maybe he had to bribe someone to dance with me and so for that reason I would just as soon not go to the high school dances.

There was another obligation connected with going to work and having a steady job. As soon as I went to work for the telephone office, I had my choice of either paying board and room at home which was expected when you had a steady job, you contributed to the family income or at my mother's suggestion, I made monthly payments on a chesterfield and chair. This was the first new furniture that we had since the onset of the Depression. It was something my mother wanted and rather than be paid board and room, she picked out a sofa and chair, matching set, that she liked at Weller & Hopkins which was a little store on Washington Street in those days, and I went in every month and made the monthly payments. I think I paid something like $11 or $12 a month on the sofa and the chair. This was my share of contributing to the family income.

One of the most memorable dates I had was when I was going with the son of the family friends that I mentioned earlier. We were at Eagles Picnic over at Sonoma and there was a fellow, they called it barnstorming in those days, a man with a small bi-plane, two seater, open cockpit, open to the air, and he was charging $5.00 a couple for flight over Sonoma for just a few minutes, probably ten minutes airborne altogether. Well my friend did not have five dollars, he had two dollars and he offered the man two dollars, it was getting late in the day and the man was not getting many takers so he took us up for two dollars. I was scared to death, but I would never admit it because here was my chance to fly, this was in 1936, and so the fellow banked and turned and I thought sure I was going to be sick and throw up, and the wind was blowing my hair all around and I was hanging on for dear life and we looked down on the picnic grounds in El Verano in Sonoma and thank goodness pretty soon I was back on the ground my legs were shaking so I could hardly stand but by golly I had my first airplane flight.

On a date with Lew Evans he had a chance to borrow his father's Packard for the evening. It was an enormous car, it had jump seats, it looked like it was a mile long like we were driving a fire engine, but anyway it was ours for the evening. So all we could afford was the gasoline for this thing

because it slurped it up almost as fast as you could put it in. So that was our date, we drove in high style across the Golden Gate Bridge to San Francisco, found the first place we could to stop and park safely and we had a hamburger and turned around and came back home across the bridge. That is all we could afford, we had a night out and this beautiful big car and it was ours for the evening.

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PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name EVANS GEORGINA MINETTE VOLKERTS
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 670 VILLAGE DRIVE MCMINNVILLE, OR
97038-8501

Marital status: Married ___ Sihgle ___ Divorced ___ Widowed ✓

Birthdate 10-14-18 Birthplace PETALUMA - CALIFORNIA

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 73 YEARS

Education: Elementary school CINNABAR

Secondary school PETALUMA HIGH SCHOOL Grad 1935

College SANTA ROSA JR COLLEGE Grad —

Other ___

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) LITTLE THEATER (CHEF & WRAPPER) FROZEN FOODS PTLA
BUTCHERS-UNION - BUSINESS REP. PTLA; (OTHER NAPA)
DR. FIMS - RECEPTIONIST PACIFIC TEL.

Travels CANADA, EUROPE MEXICO, BAJA CALIF.
HAWAII, CALIF. NEV. UTAH. IDAHO. MISSOURI, TEXAS

Organizations, clubs ADULT CENTER - MCMINNVILLE, OR. LDS CHURCH

Other special interests WRITING, GARDENING, WALKING
READING, TRAVEL AND VOLUNTEER WORK AT
PETALUMA PEOPLES SERVICES, SEDONA COMMUNITY

Additional comments THRIFT SHOP (AZ) and now at
MCMINNVILLA ADULT CENTER (OR).

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Family History Questionnaire

	Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Deceased? Date
Parents*	FRED LAURENCE VOLKERTS	1894 OCT 27	[illegible]	[illegible]
	GEORGIA CATHLEEN GOODWIN	JUNE 4 1896	PETALUMA	YES JUNE 1983
Brothers & Sisters	KATHLEEN VOLKERTS EVANS	SEPT 23 1921	PETALUMA	
	FRED LAURENCE VOLKERTS	MAY 1 1923	PETALUMA	
	WILBUR REGIS VOLKERTS	JUNE 20 1926	PETALUMA	
Grand-parents*	JACOB FRED VOLKERTS	SEPT 24 1877	CALIFORNIA [illegible]	YES 1944
	MATILDA PETERS	DEC 25 1860	" " "	YES 1935
	WILLIAM HENRY GOODWIN	DEC 31 1874	DEVONSHIRE ENGLAND	YES EARLY
	JENNIE FOSTER	OCT 23 1883	SCOTTY COUNTY IRELAND	YES 1933
Spouse	LEWIS BRADFORD EVANS	JAN 27 1919	PETALUMA	YES DEC 1985
Children	NANCY EVANS SPALETTA	NOV 24 1942	NAPA, CA	
	SALLY EVANS CHENEY	APR 3 1944	NAPA, CA	
	GAIL EVANS 1943	APR 5	PETALUMA	YES 1945
	KAY EVANS ELSE 1948	APR 6	PETALUMA	APRIL
	SUZANNE EVANS MILLER	MAR 31 1950	PETALUMA	
Grandchildren	MARTIN EUGENE CHENEY	SEPT 22 1965	SAN FRANCISCO, CA	
	JARMIL KAY CHENEY ROMER	JAN 1 1970	UTAH	
	AMIRA CHENEY BARTSCH	SEPT 6	ANAHEIM CA	
	TASHA CHENEY 1974 PITH	DEC 25	SANTA ROSA CA.	
	ELSA CHENEY RHODES 1977	FEB 22	SANTA ROSA	
	CODY AMADEUS CHENEY	JAN 6 1980	MISSOURI	
	STEPHANIE STOLTZFUS 1972	OCT 2	[illegible]	
	LEWIS STOLT 1975	MAR 11	SALT LAKE CITY	1994 YES MAR
	ANDREW STOLT 1973	NOV 5	SANTA ROSA	
	STEPHANIE STOLT FULLMER 1972	JUNE 30	GRANGER UTAH	
	GEORGIA PAULINE STOLT 1980	JULY 20 1983	SANTA ROSA CA	
	SAMUEL JAMES STOLT	SEPT 12	GRANGER UTAH	

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM
Oral History Program

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PLACE MOLALLA. OREGON

DATE MAY 18 '98

Georgia M. Evans
(Interviewee)

Maxine Durney
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

address of our house with the
acs changed 4 times through
years, as I remember:
te 1, Box 313
te 1, Box 606
7 Redwood Highway
7 Petaluma Blvd. North